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SUBJECT: U.S.-VIETNAM FISHERIES CONSULTATIONS

1. SUMMARY: A USG fisheries delegation led by the U.S. Department of Commerce NOAA Fisheries and including STATE/OES and others met with Vietnamese fisheries officials and visited several fisheries-related activities in and near Hanoi the week of March 10. Both sides gained insight into opportunities for future cooperation through the talks. While the U.S. government is not in a position to provide financial assistance to the Vietnamese fisheries sector, there are many ways technical assistance on capacity building may take place. A Vietnamese delegation will visit the U.S. in April 2003 and Vietnam will host the annual meetings of the APEC Fisheries Working Group and the APEC Marine Resources Conservation Working Group the week of June 9, 2003. These events will continue to build understanding of what Vietnam's fisheries sector can expect in the international arena, and how U.S. fishery officials can best assist Vietnam in sustainable development of its capture fisheries and its aquaculture programs. END SUMMARY.

2. The 2003 Fisheries Consultations Between Vietnam and the United States were held on March 10-13, 2003, in Hanoi, Vietnam. The Vietnamese delegation was led by Dr. Vu Van Trieu, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Fisheries (MOFI) International Cooperation Department, and the U.S. delegation was led by Dr. Rebecca Lent, Deputy Director for Regulatory Affairs, U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service.

3. The meeting between Vietnam and the United States began with a courtesy visit with Minister of Fisheries, Dr. Ta Quang Ngoc, who warmly welcomed U.S. delegates and stressed the importance of the fisheries relationship between Vietnam and the United States. The head of the U.S. delegation expressed thanks to the Ministry of Fisheries for hosting this meeting and spoke briefly of the similar challenges faced by the United States and Vietnam in conserving and managing our respective living marine resources.

OPENING REMARKS

4. Dr. Vu Van Trieu, Deputy Director of the MOFI International Cooperation Department welcomed the delegation from the United States and noted work by Vietnam to address fisheries sector development, including on-going efforts to restructure the fisheries sector to promote aquaculture and increase deep-water fishing operations. Dr. Trieu stressed the importance of non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and International Organization assistance in these efforts. In addition, he noted that increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation will bring increased market access, better management, and technology transfer to Vietnamese fisheries. Finally, Dr. Trieu briefly reviewed the history of the fisheries relationship between Vietnam and the United States and stressed the value of continued and enhanced fisheries cooperation between the two countries.

5. Dr. Lent thanked the Ministry of Fisheries for their efforts in organizing and hosting this meeting. She stressed the similar nature of the challenges faced by the United States and Vietnam in conserving and managing our living marine resources and noted the value of cooperation in addressing these common challenges. Dr. Lent requested that Vietnam provide specific ideas for future cooperation between our two countries. Mr. Charles Ehler, Director of the International Program Office at the National Ocean Service, NOAA, presented a brief description of the cooperation already underway between Vietnam and the National Ocean Service in the Gulf of Tonkin. This work focuses on capacity building in the Ha Long Bay area to promote further development of the marine protected area and integrated coastal zone management, including inshore fisheries.

VIETNAMESE FISHERIES IN 2002

6. Ms. Tran Thi Mieng, Vice Director of the MOFI Planning and Investment Department, provided an overview of the Vietnamese fisheries. The first part of this presentation related to the current economic situation in Vietnamese fisheries, focusing on achievements in resource protection, aquaculture, and fisheries export and processing. The second part of the presentation looked at the Vietnamese plan for areas of future development until the year 2010. It included recommendations for U.S. support in areas related to training in fisheries monitoring and safety at sea, aquaculture, U.S. import/export laws and regulations, and fisheries conservation and management.

17. Dr. Vu Van Trieu, Deputy Director of the MOFI International Cooperation Department, then provided an overview of international cooperation relating to the fisheries sector. He noted that Vietnam receives large contributions from various sources for fisheries sector work and provided detailed lists of past, on-going, and possible future donor projects. Dr. Trieu stressed the importance of these funding sources to Vietnam and encouraged the United States to provide assistance for new projects.

POTENTIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION

18. Mr. Nguyen Van Chau, Director of the MOFI Fisheries Resources Protection Department summarized the current situation with regard to Vietnamese fisheries resource protection. This presentation included an overview of fisheries resources in Vietnam, information on fishing fleet trends, and activities designed to restructure and improve the fisheries sector in Vietnam. It also touched on work that Vietnam would like to do concerning fisheries resource protection (including integration of management at various levels, community-based management, marine protected area and endangered species management, and vessel management) and enforcement and safety at sea (including vessel enforcement and accident/emergency response).

19. Dr. Nguyen Van Thanh, Deputy Director of the MOFI Fisheries Department, provided an overview of some potential areas of future fisheries cooperation between the United States and Vietnam. Specifically, Vietnam would like work on aquaculture (including environmental protection in aquaculture, seed production technology, farming technology, and human resources training).

10. The US Delegation responded to these proposals by noting that the Vietnamese presentations were informative and helpful in understanding the specific areas of possible cooperation between the two countries. Given the difficult budget situation in U.S. federal agencies, there will be a need to be creative in selecting activities that build upon existing programs. Dr. Lent noted that in addition to the National Marine Fisheries Service, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) includes the National Ocean Service (NOS), NOAA Research and the National Weather Service (NWS). NOS has a number of cooperative activities with Vietnam (see discussion below). NOAA Research includes the Sea Grant Program, which is not only involved in aquaculture research, but also provides for training through the Sea Grant student-funding program. The National Weather Service is working with its counterpart in Vietnam on flood forecasts, and Dr. Lent indicated that NOAA Fisheries would make contact with their counterparts at NWS upon their return.

11. In the spirit of working within current programs to the maximum extent possible, Dr. Lent suggested that the various NOAA Fisheries programs might be able to host visitors from Vietnam for 2 to 3 month internships. These visits could be in science centers, regional offices, or at headquarters, and cover science, management, enforcement, and other topics. It was noted that these visits would need to be funded by Vietnam, for travel and lodging expenses. The National Marine Fisheries Service can assist with identifying options for local lodging.

12. Dr. Lent also noted that the types of aquaculture research and technical assistance contained in the cooperation proposals might be more appropriate for the academic community. Through the Sea Grant program and other avenues, NMFS may be able to assist their colleagues from Vietnam in making contact with appropriate university staff.

13. Dr. Loh-Lee Low described the Fisheries Science Centers of National Marine Fisheries Service that have research programs that could offer cooperative opportunities for Vietnamese scientists. The mission of the Science Centers is to conduct scientific research programs to generate the best scientific information for understanding and conserving the Nation's living marine resources and the environmental quality essential for their existence. The Science Centers cover a wide geographical range and diversity of species that are bound to cover the scientific interests of Vietnamese scientists.

14. The Centers conduct research on the economically important resources and their interactions with ecologically related species and their ecosystems. The Centers conduct resource surveys and analyze the data with commercial fisheries data collected through programs such as the Fisheries Observer Programs. The Observer programs place biologists to collect scientific data from fishing vessels and processing plants. These survey and data gathering programs offer opportunities to train Vietnamese scientists on the finer techniques of collecting data for stock assessments.

15. The Centers analyze data to determine the population dynamics and status of the stocks and evaluate impacts of fishing and effects of environmental change on the resources and their ecosystems. The Centers also have social scientists and economists who evaluate impacts of alternative fishing strategies on the fishing communities. These programs can further offer training opportunities for Vietnamese scientists. While there are many opportunities for cooperative programs between our Fisheries Science Centers with Vietnam, there are no identifiable financial resources that have been set aside to execute such programs. However, there may be opportunities for case-by-case cooperation when the research interests of some of our programs match those of Vietnam.

16. Mr. Charles Ehler, who serves as the Vice-Chair of the World Conservation Union's (acronym is IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas, outlined the responsibilities of the National Ocean Service, particularly in the areas of coastal management and marine protected management. He pointed out that habitat management is the common link between coastal, marine protected area, and fisheries management. He then described progress on an existing two-year (2002-2004) NOAA project with the Ministry of Fisheries, Institute of Fisheries Economics and Planning (Dr. Nguyen Chu Hoi), and IUCN-Vietnam to build capacity for integrated coastal management (ICM) in the Gulf of Tonkin, with a focus on Ha Long Bay. Ha Long Bay is one of only twelve Marine World Heritage Sites in the world. It lies within a region that will develop significantly over the next 10 years. The project will sponsor a socio-economic assessment workshop in Ha Long Bay from 18-20 March, a workshop on integrated coastal management in April, and a mid-term project evaluation meeting in the United States in October. Mr. Ehler also noted coastal management training opportunities for Vietnamese participants in Coastal Zone '03, an international conference in Baltimore, Maryland, from 13-17 July, and IUCN's World Parks Congress, an important meeting of the world's protected area managers and scientists, that will be held in Durban, South Africa from 8-17 September, 2003.

17. While the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) was unable to attend this meeting, they have expressed a willingness to cooperate where possible to address Vietnamese training interests relating to fisheries enforcement and safety at sea. The U.S. delegation provided a number of paper and CDROM copies of the USCG International Training Management Handbook and one possible training pipeline scenario that might be useful to Vietnam in its training decisions. The complete catalog is also available at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-ci/affairs/handbook/index.htm>.

18. While the USCG provides at-sea enforcement in U.S. fisheries, the National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement is charged with dockside inspections and investigation of possible fisheries regulation/law infractions. The U.S. delegation encouraged the Vietnamese to consult the provided information and develop specific training interests for the future. It was agreed that the U.S. would consult with the Vietnamese MOFI point of contact and appropriate USCG and NMFS enforcement personnel to begin examining possible future training opportunities and discuss funding options.

19. The U.S. delegation also encouraged Vietnam to join the International Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) Network and committed to providing further information on this important enforcement organization. This is a no-cost option for increasing enforcement capability in Vietnam.

20. Discussing assistance to Vietnamese personnel on U.S. export-import laws, regulations and procedures, the U.S. and Vietnam reaffirmed the importance of maintaining a relationship based on free and fair trade. Vietnam expressed its desire to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) as soon as possible. The United States welcomed this news and noted that Vietnam's engagement in a range of multilateral and regional fora, such as APEC and the FAO, was exactly the right approach to inform its policies and gain influence in the world arena. The U.S. offered to assist Vietnam in acceding to the WTO.

21. The United States highlighted the rapid increase in imports of fisheries products from Vietnam as an example of expanding commercial relations between the two countries. Both the United States and Vietnam acknowledged that recent trade frictions were business-to-business matters and do not reflect policy differences on trade relations between Hanoi and Washington, D.C.

22. The U.S. trade regime was characterized as open and transparent. The United States agreed to help Vietnam better understand its trade system where possible, including through bilateral exchanges of information such as these

talks provide. The United States considered it worth noting that the U.S. administration, including the Executive Branch Agencies of the Department of Commerce and the U.S. International Trade Commission are compelled to go forward with a trade case once it is initiated and, therefore, the Administration has no discretion to halt the process. Vietnam expressed their desire that this case be addressed in a fair and accurate manner.

123. Both sides shared their experiences and views regarding the interruption of imports caused by issues related to antibiotic residues. Vietnam expressed its interest in receiving training in the area of food safety and sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures.

124. Finally, it was pointed out that the Vietnam Embassy and Consulates in the United States can help Vietnam with its exports to the United States. At the same time, the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi can assist with imports from the United States.

U.S. PROPOSALS/REPORTS

125. The U.S. encouraged Vietnam to accede to the UN Agreement on Fish Stocks and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Compliance Agreement, and to implement the FAO International Plans of Action (IPOAs) and the Code of Conduct. The U.S. provided website addresses for copies of their NPOAs on sharks, seabirds, capacity and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU). Vietnam indicated that they were fully aware of the FAO plans of action and were implementing these through their various activities.

126. Regarding the Status and Trends issue at FAO, there was discussion of how Vietnam can get some assistance in improving the quality and quantity of their reporting on fisheries. These efforts will improve the quality of stock assessments, which are so critical to improved fishery management.

127. The group reviewed the outcome of the COFI meeting discussion regarding FAO-CITES cooperation. Three documents from the meeting were noted: 1) Workplan - completed at COFI; 2) The establishment of the advisory body - completed at COFI; 3) The MOU - will require further work.

128. Vietnam noted that they have a sea turtle project underway with the assistance of WWF, IUCN, and TRAFFIC. Vietnam has a number of protected areas that are nesting beaches for these sea turtles. In 1997, Vietnam and other ASEAN members signed an MOU on ASEAN Sea Turtle Conservation and Protection. In 2001 Vietnam also signed an MOU on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia. Vietnam is also developing an NPOA for sea turtles. Dr. Lent expressed appreciation for the activities underway in Vietnam regarding sea turtle conservation. She noted that in the United States, a number of fisheries have been subjected to severe restrictions, including closures, because of sea turtle by-catch. In many cases, some of the species (particularly leatherback and loggerheads) have nesting beaches in Vietnam.

129. The APEC Fisheries Working Group has completed several projects that could be useful to address aquaculture problems raised by Vietnam. For example, the 1999 Import Risk Assessment project explains detailed procedures that can be used to prevent the spread of shrimp virus through imported seed, or larvae.

130. Work is just beginning on a new project, approved at the FWG meeting in Lima last year that will look at two important studies that should be completed before an aquaculture project is started. One evaluation should look at environmental sustainability of an aquaculture project. The other evaluation should consider economic sustainability. Economic sustainability can be determined by an analysis of domestic and international market demands for the planned aquaculture model. For example, a project for salmon aquaculture is probably not a good idea, because too many companies are already producing salmon and the prices are low.

131. June 2003, Vietnam will be hosting a joint meeting of the APEC Fisheries Working Group and the Marine Resources Conservation Working Group. The two sides discussed preparations for these working group meetings and for an industry roundtable to be held in conjunction with these meetings.

132. COMMENT: Following the talks, the USDel traveled with MOFI staff to visit Provincial officials at Ha Long Bay, in Quang Ninh Province. In talks with People's Committee officials and with Provincial fisheries officials, the delegation learned more about the Province's plans for the

future and the problems it faced in implementing them. A boat visit to Ha Long Bay itself, a World Heritage site, gave the delegation insights into marine environment user conflicts that face the Bay. The delegation also visited Hai Phong City. There they visited with the Research Institute of Marine Fisheries and its fisheries research vessel. The final stop was a visit to the Ha Long Fisheries Corporation. This State-owned enterprise appears to be facing severe economic difficulties.

133. This cable was cleared by OES/OMC:Stetson Tinkham.

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